DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 078 HE 003 554

AUTHOR	Stimpson, Catharine R.
TITLE	What Matter Mind: A Theory about the Practice of Women's Studies.
PUB DATE	Aug 72
NOTE	17p.; Draft Copy
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Feminism; *Higher Education; *Sex Discrimination; *Womens Education; *Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

The area of women's studies has come under attack from many quarters, but the most damaging criticism has come from those who are women themselves. Spoken criticism and lack of participation are equally as harmful in an area such as women's studies, where total sacrifice and participation is necessary for survival. The people who resist women's studies are so numerous, the affection for intelligent women so frail, the self-destructive impulses within women's studies so tempting, the unanswered questions so complex, that it seems obvious that women's studies is in a position of weakness. In order for women's studies to survive and for women to gain the rights that should be theirs, several things are needed. More needs to be learned about a student's conscious and unconscious needs. Men and women alike should be taught that a woman has the talent to learn; that society will reward her if she does; and that if society does not, it may be society's fault. In addition, women of differing ages, circumstances, and economic groups need to be brought into the classroom that the defects of middle-class sexual roles might be pointed out and that ambition might be encouraged. (Author/HS)

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WHAT MATTER MIND: A Theory about the Practice of Women's Studies

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August 1972

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WHAT MATTER MIND:

A Theory About the Practice of Women's Studies (1)

I write as a feminist and as an assistant professor of English who teaches a Women's Studies course at a traditional women's college. I believe that impulses within the Women's Studies movement may force it to destroy itself. The impulses reflect many of the more highly-publicized tensions within the feminist movement as a whole. My purpose is to picture them and to prescribe a tentative strategy for survival. My method is impressionistic rather than scientific.

A vocabulary of crisis may seem apocalyptic. After all, Women's Studies is apparently flourishing. In 1969 only a handful of courses existed. In 1971 there were roughly 600 courses in roughly 200 institutions. (2) The number is apparently increasing. A group now planning a Women's Studies program at the University of Pennsylvania finds Women's Studies so wide-spread that it surveys current, national programs before devising one of its own. The courses have infiltrated public and private schools, prestigious and struggling schools, places as disparate as Yale, Kent State University Experimental College, and Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California. Sarah Lawrence, the University of Iowa, and Goddard/Cambridge are among the institutions that offer graduate work. (3)

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(1) I am grateful to the many people who have helped me to work out my ideas, especially to the participants at United States Office of Education Affirmative Action Institutes at the University of Florida and at the University of Tennessee in June, 1972; Lila Karp; and to my colleagues and students at Barnard College.

Two papers, which I read in unpublished form, touch on several of the points I mention. They are Sheila Tobias, "Women's Liberation Phase Two," and Konnilyn G. Feig, "Myths of Women's Liberation: The Feminist Movement Revisited.

(2) Elaine Showalter, in "Introduction: Teaching about Women, 1971," Female Studies IV (Pittsburgh: KNOW Press, Inc., 1971), recalls that in 1969 she was the only faculty member at a workshop about higher education at a conference about women who was actually teaching a course about women. Showalter's essay is a thorough, competent survey of Women's Studies programs and the literature about them. My count of courses comes from the KNOW Press Female Studies Series, available from KNOW, Inc., P.O. Box 86031, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15221. In a letter to me, dated July 26, 1972, Bernice Sandler, Executive Associate, Association of American Colleges, says she estimates there might be around 700 courses, having come "across courses that were not listed" in Female Studies.

(3) The women's colleges have, however, been comparatively slow to initiate Women's Studies. See Caroline Bird, "Women's Lib and the Women's Colleges," Change, 4, 30 (April 1972), 60-65.

The people who start, support, and teach Women's Studies are energetic, honorable, and tough. They have resolved to put the serious study of women into the academic curriculum. Useful services -- journals, presses, women's commissions and caucusses within professional organizations, conferences -- are beginning. Nor do women shrink from the politics of Women's Studies and from the political demands of starting them. Moreover, few assume that knowledge is really powerful enough to make a Women's Studies program the remedy for inequality. On the contrary, they fear that people will ignore the pervasive inequality of women if a narrow scholarly program about them is there.

Given such growth, given such women, my concerns need clarification. They arise because of the nature of the sour, internecine quarrels that drain Women's Studies and because of the nature of its external opposition. Quarrels haunt all political movements. The more radical the movement the more vicious the internal struggles seem to become. One suspects that hostility first compels radicalism and then allies compel each other's hostility. The fights within Women's Studies have a unique flavor: the dislike women evidence for other women, which makes collective action emotionally perilous. To that dislike, women often add an atavistic, but well-documented, distrust of women in authority, which transforms potential leaders into possible ogres whom we hound. Women have apparently accepted the theory that womanliness and power may never converge in one person. The distrust has a special mode within academic circles: the public denunciation of women who have conventional credentials (e.g. publications or the Ph.D.). As feminism has become more fashionable, some women get attention, job offers, and mildly grave requests from foundations for advice. Such favors, if favors they be, become as suspect as a bibliography or a doctorate. Every woman knows the language in which these charges are coded and publicized: "star," "elitist," "someone who rips off the movement," or "academic." The charges are pressed against women who have some influence, no matter how small, or some reputation, no matter how minor, or some credentials. (4)

To be fair, women have asked for it, as we said in childhood fights. Nearly every Women's Studies meeting has had its share of reprint-pushers, title-mongers, and book-peddlers. Part of this is the natural exuberance of women who, after years of being ignored by colleagues simply because they were women, find themselves within an acceptable, even an exciting, public force. They have come alive. Part of this, more sinister, is the vulgar egoism of any person who suddenly picks up power in a society that values power and revels in it. All credentialed women are also suspect because of the mewing and cowardice of many women scholars in the past. Modeling their careers on those of male scholars; believing that women must adapt themselves to the demands of the university; accepting the ways and means of a modern university, such academics have given the woman scholar

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(4) See Joreen, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," Second Wave, 2,1(1972), 20-25, 42, for general comment about elitism, the star system, and internal democracy.

a reputation so suspect that women who lack a Ph.D. assume that having one must be tantamount to disliking feminism, or any activism.

Women new to success, which the women's movement may have helped them to achieve, often experience still other difficulties with women. Making it in the academic world is far easier if one has secretarial help and psychic support. The more successful the career, the more accessible such aids. Women have traditionally given both. A woman may find herself, for the first time, in a position to employ, to use, even to exploit other women, for apparently decent ends. Her position is awkward. Her discomfort may congeal into personal awkwardness.

Yet the women who accuse other women of elitism, of being neo-Lionel Trillings or neo-Robbin Flemings, often mask personal fear behind their aggressive political rhetoric. The way in which the word "intimidate" is deployed among people in Women's Studies is suggestive. A woman who says that another woman is intimidating her is admitting to fear. However, she glamorizes her panic as she transforms her self-image from a frightened person into the harried victim of a tyrant.

In my experience, the women most quick to rebuke other women for elitism are graduate students; women uncertain about taking on an academic career; women who have interrupted their career for more conventionally "feminine" pursuits; or women committed to large educational reforms. The woman whose commitment to a seemingly routine academic career is firm may implicitly reproach them, offering a symbol of a success about which they may feel insecure and ambivalent. Lashing out at the Ph.D., they then lash down guilt and self-contempt.

People also falsely assume that learning and activism are incompatible; that the woman who goes in the library in the morning will never emerge to demonstrate in the afternoon; or that going into the library at all will infect going out into the streets. The assumption, oddly totalitarian, implies that there is only one pure way to either justice or perfection. It both denies feminism the fertility of <u>avant-garde</u> thought and takes up the energy of women who must repeatedly defend their good faith. It creates an inner contradiction. The women who say that any scholarship is inevitably politically sterile are themselves a part of the academy. Degrading the academy, they degrade their own place. Ironically, they often patronize non-academic women. Announcing that a Ph.D. can only befuddle an ordinary housewife, they put down the housewife as much as the Ph.D.

The situation that I outline is psychological. Suspicion, fear, and distrust; the need to boast and the need to climb that provokes much of the suspicion, fear, and distrust are feelings, emotions, responses. The conflict they arouse may submit to consciousness-raising, therapy, good faith, and good will. However, other quarrels are political. The conflict of ideologies is so severe that it may be beyond reconciliation.

People in Women's Studies tend to belong to one of five categories: 1) The pioneers, who took women as a subject of academic concern before the New Feminism became a public force; 2) The ideologues, who were feminists first and who then tried to adapt their feminism to their work, their politics to their profession; 3) The radicals, who place their feminism within a theoretical context of demands for revolutionary educational, political, and social overhaul; 4) The late-comers, who recently discovered that women were an interesting academic subject, and who may become ideologues as they experience sexual discrimination when they try to set up a Women's Studies course; and 5) The bandwagoneers, both men and women, whose interest in Women's Studies is more in keeping up with fashion and in bucking up enrollment than in Women's Studies. I am an ideologue who wavers towards radicalism. A commitment to institutional change, as well as temperament, keeps me from a hardening of radicalism.

The most bitter quarrel, because its antagonists are in ways the closest, is between the ideologue and the radical. The pioneer tends to stay aloof. The late-comer is busy with discoveries. The bandwagoneer either drops out or fails to understand the elementary terms of the quarrels. The radicals are the most apt to accuse others of elitism, of political cowardice, and of betrayal of equality in general and equality for women in particular. The ideologues are the most nervously sensitive to those charges.

A practical question, which programs have actually confronted, dramatizes political quarrels. Should a Women's Studies program take foundation money? An ideologue, though she might hesitate, would probably answer yes. She would argue that a Women's Studies program can use the money; that it can evade foundation control; that women might as well take what support is around. A radical would probably answer no. She would argue that foundations, like the universities, share in the moral, economic, and political sins of America; that they have been racist as well as sexist; that they have done little but salve the conscience of people in power in a society that brutally misuses power. Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie, Sloan -- all were rapacious destroyers of the earth, rapacious creatures of international empires. To take their money would be to accept a tainted bribe, to assume the rewards of a privileged class, and to submit to the control of a corrupt group.

The quarrel, and the animating visions behind it, are clearly beyond compromise. Either a Women's Studies program takes foundation money, or it does not. I can hardly reject foundation money for six months and then accept it for the next six, a Persephone living first with the Ceres of righteous poverty and then with the Hades of dark affluence.

A more theoretical question, which men and women often raise, symbolizes the complexity of ideological conflict. Should the members of a Women's Studies program celebrate if a woman became, say, the president of General Motors or a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Here ideologues differ. Some say yes. They reason either that a woman would do the job better than a man, a version of the theory of the moral superiority of women; or that women must penetrate every American institution; or that

women must have as many choices as possible. A woman who chose to become a five-star general might have made a regrettable choice, but the intrinsic ability to choose is what matters, particularly if the choice is one previously closed to women. Other ideologues, I among them, say no. They reason that some choices, such as that of a high military career, are so antithetical to the principles of the women's movement that to make them is to drop out.

Nor is the radical answer simple. Every radical says that the American military and that American capitalism are obscene. No person should work for them. However, radical women differ on the use of violence to bring about revolutionary change. Some approve of violence, which the military also use, as a tool. Some do not. The former idealize North Vietnamese and Viet Cong women, who seem to embody revolutionary morality, feminism, and legitimized violence. Too often the American feminist/revolutionary confuses honoring the Vietnamese, which I do, and believing that to imitate them would make America a revolutionary society, which I find fantastic.

The identification with the Vietnamese, or Algerian, or other Third World women, of the white, American, middle-class feminist/revolutionary, is part of the larger, popular analysis of all women as members of a single, oppressed class. But the white American, thinking of herself as a Vietnamese or stressing her sisterly links with a woman Arab guerilla, is actually inflating her own sense of oppression. It is sad, if only because a realistic assessment of her own life would give its own evidence of repression. It is also intellectually sloppy.

Psychological and ideological conflicts are part of the classroom as well. Some Women's Studies teachers try to blend the drama of the Women's Studies class and the drama of the women's movement as do some students. The students whom I have known are either the curious, who think a Women's Studies course might be fun; the committed feminists, who take Women's Studies because of their moral, intellectual, and personal devotion to the New Feminism; or feminist radicals, who find Women's Studies one of the few fluid programs in a rigid university. The curious often become feminists. The feminists usually stay that way. The radicals may become disgusted. Their suspicions -- that a classroom is a refuge from a tough, political struggle; that any classroom clamps down self-expression -- are confirmed. The curious and the feminists unite in boredom with what they politely call "radical rhetoric."

One example: in the spring of 1971 I was teaching "Images of Women in Literature" for the first time. About twenty-five women were enrolled. A boy friend or two usually came as well. I had assigned Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse. We argued about Mrs. Ramsey, a quarrel at once moral and literary. The radicals, who hated Ms. Ramsey, called her a sheltered bourgeois wife who submitted to Mr. Ramsey's intolerable demands. Some feminists, while they agreed that Ms. Ramsey played a traditional role, saw agreeable virtues in it: the wish to unify the fragments of experience; the effort to bring together alienated

men and women. The curious said that Mrs. Ramsey was a character in a beautiful novel. To read the novel as a tract was to misread it and to annoy them.

As the debate went on and on, the class looked to me to end it, to impose a professorial right to ring down the curtain. I refused. Though I was trying to be consistent with my tentative theory that a Women's Studies teacher dissolves classroom authority, I doomed us to repetition and confusion. The next year no-one fought very much at all. Neither the curious nor the radicals were as dogmatic. I am unsure whether this was an anomaly or part of a trend.

Psychologically at odds, hiding our fears behind political rhetoric, politically at odds as it is, people in Women's Studies go on to indulge in the flimsiest of self-congratulatory talk about intellectual adventurousness. We hurt ourselves because we deceive ourselves and because we risk contempt as we promise an Utopia of the mind and build another suburban tract. The current promises are: 1) interdisciplinary work, which will give the most spacious possible view of women and society, adequate knowledge, and rich conceptual models; and 2) team teaching and research, which will provide the human resources for interdisciplinary work, while it will eschew the figure of the entrepreneurial scholar who treats a seminar as if it were an oil field and he a Rockefeller with a doctorate.

The tributes to interdisciplinary work are more odes to an ideal than analyses of practice. Our actual interdisciplinary feats, so far so tame, have consisted of remarks about the same subject (e.g. sexual initiation or the figure of the lady) made at one time by persons from several disciplines; or the resurrection of old practices within certain disciplines (e.g. a revived interest in the sociology of literature); or a simple blurring of strict disciplinary lines (e.g. using literary autobiography as a primary source in a history class).

When persons from disparate disciplines do get together, they find that they know little or nothing about each other's jargon, models, and methods. I sat in a meeting of women scholars and watched an economist become more and more bemused as the literary critics divided the past into the Middle Ages, Renaissance, 17th-century, Augustan Age, Victorian Period, and Modern Literature. Then the critics listened and puzzled as the economist divided the past into pre- and post-Industrial Revolution. The struggles that Women's Studies practitioners have in cross-fertilizing disciplines is less a comment about them than about the extreme specialization of American scholarship, often dangerous to accept, and about the need for specialization of any scholarship, dangerous to reject.

The most ingenious team research seems to be done within one discipline, a practice scientists have long followed. Except for that, except for the odd biology course, Women's Studies has had little to do with science. This is ironic, if only because of the role of science in liberating women. A necessary condition of the New Feminism has been birth

control, which did give women control over their own bodies and sexuality. So doing, it helped to release the energy for a broad political movement.

I sampled two-hundred of the Women's Studies courses in Female Studies III. Over one-fourth were in literature, the theatre, or the media. Nearly one-fourth were in sociology. Another fourth were in history, political science, or law. Psychology, anthropology, and "interdisciplinary" each had one-twentieth. The rest of the courses were in sexuality (including homosexuality and gay liberation); philosophy, religion, fine arts, education, and Oriental Studies.

The ratios were probably predictable. Women have had easier access to the humanities and softer social sciences. "Nationally, the proportion of women on college and university faculties is usually cited as between 18% and 22%. The comparable figure for the modern language fields is 37%....Most political science departments have no women faculty."(5) More women teachers and students are available to sponsor courses. Notions about women are abundant in the humanities and softer social sciences. If anything, an excess of material exists for study, repudiation, and revision. The subjects have a close relationship to everyday life. People pass easily from theory to practice, material to self, idea to action. Finally, many people in Women's Studies believe in educational reform. They distrust the process of rational thought as a process of consciousness. Finding modern science the smug fortress of rationality, they avoid it.

I advocate, not that all women become scientists, but Women's Studies treat science more respectfully. To substitute a feminist humanities program for a masculinized one is good, but incomplete. Unless women enter fully into science and technology, they will remain outside a source of power in modern society. They will also perpetuate the ugly myth that women are too weak for the rigors of scientific thought and unfit for the management of its apparatus.

I am sorry about the suicidal impulses within Women's Studies -- not simply because I would mourn any such impulse; not simply because they reinforce the tired old theory that women are good only for food, sex, and babies; not simply becuase they hurt the most humane movement I know; but because they personally hurt me. The New Feminism has given many of us our life's work. It has helped to make our lives work. The self-destruction of the movement would spell our destruction, too.

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(5) Florence Howe, "A Report on Women and the Profession," College English, 32, 8 (May 1971), 850. The paper was read as an introduction to the MLA Forum on Women in the Profession, December, 1970.

Moreover, Women's Studies has too many enemies outside of the movement who can and will harm it. The dangers out there demand vigilant attention. The resistance to Women's Studies has grown, not shrunk, as Women's Studies has grown. Its mode ranges from passive skepticism to active hostility, a skepticism and hostility inseparable from negative feelings about the New Feminism and women.

Opponents of Women's Studies are effective without having exercised too vulgar or too massive a display of strength. The non-tenured and marginal status of many of its supporters, the weakness of the divisions of a university that may sponsor a course, and the volatile nature of student politics make Women's Studies unusually vulnerable. Administrators, too, may put in a course only to pacify the protesting feminists. When calm seems restored, the course goes.

Some shows of resistance look comic. Hearing about them, one feels a twinge, not unmixed with snobbery, of ironic amusement. I think of the sociologist from Texas who told me that when she mentioned some of the ideas of the New Feminism in a class, some of its members set up a prayer session to save her soul. However, the sources of resistance are usually either too powerful to be ignored or too sympathetic on other grounds to be rejected. They include: institutional conservatives of both sexes, who find curricular change as alarming as dogmatic Christians did the challenge to the infallibility of Scripture; women who fear the tumult of altering the definition of sexuality their society has given, and they have taken; and blacks, who find Women's Studies the newest toy of the protected, white, middle-class woman greedy for more status. The ignorance of white women about the black struggle and the competition between blacks and white women for jobs that affirmative action programs have opened up only pulls the snare of tension tighter. And on several campusses, sisterhood has become hard to sustain as the quiet, malleable women get the jobs, promotions, and rewards the militant women have won for the movement, and then fail to support the militants.

The most virulent opponents of Women's Studies are probably none of the above, but younger, male faculty members. They fear women as colleagues. Their anxiety is partly rooted in the neurotic conviction that losing to a woman is far more disgraceful than losing to a man. Such men believe that Women's Studies will bring more women into their departments. They fear, too, that they will be forced to recognize the insights of the new women scholars and to talk about women as seriously as they might about the Corn Laws or Metaphysical Wit. The contraction of the current academic job market only inflames resentment. They see women, often because of government pressure, getting the scarce jobs that would otherwise have been theirs. The job has both economic and symbolic importance. It announces that the young male Ph.D. can support a wife and family. If he is using the Ph.D. as an agent of upward social mobility, it also proclaims that he has made it out of the lower or lower-middle class.

In brief, the young men think of Women's Studies as the wedge of a force that will threaten their personal security, their intellectual

principles, their ambitions, their ability to fulfill obligations, and life itself. Cornered, anxious, angry, they fight as if they were fighting for survival -- which they very well might be. Either too unsure or too shrewd to be innovative, they use conventional weapons of academic warfare: hostile wit and little jokes at faculty, departmental, and committee meetings; quiet, man-to-man maneuvers, such as a visit to Professor X to warn him about Ms. Y; appeals to "academic standards"; and reliance on the protection of a powerful, prestigious patron. The weapons still work.

People in favor of Women's Studies must assess how much harm their opponents have done. A quick, accurate count of the number of Women's Studies courses that have been dropped and the number of Women's Studies faculty who have been displaced is overdue. My hunch is that the count will shock women as much as the action of the New York State legislature when it overthrew abortion law reform in the spring of 1972. Certainly a number of stories are now circulating.

I heard one recently from a faculty woman at a large, Midwestern university. In two semesters there the Women's Studies courses dropped from six to zero. The woman had several explanations. 1) Her non-tenured slot made her a strategic weakness; 2) the male members of the committee that administered the unit that sponsored the courses were implicitly hostile to women; for example, their attitude towards day-care was either angry or contemptuous; 3) other women on the faculty, who might have helped, were "fearful of giving time to work which (did) not advance them professionally...they seem(ed) loath to call attention to their femaleness by associating with women's studies. They want, they often say, only to be judged professionally 'as if they were men.'"; 4) pervasive distrust of any new program; 5) students "were too easily discouraged by all the above factors. One student gave up when her request to a woman faculty member to advise a course was answered by an abrupt NO."(6)

The alliance of people who oppose Women's Studies is more often implicit than explicit, more a quiet, mutual recognition than a public pledge of common interest. What they share, and another weight that Women's Studies must bear, is the cultural bias against intelligent women. Most feminists -- including men like John Stuart Mill -- have long complained about it. They have beaten their fists against the exclusion of women from the body of received knowledge and from its bureaucracy. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft was asking bitterly why "women should be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence." (7) In 1872 George Eliot was wryly defining provincial society as one in which "Women were expected to have weak opinions, but the great safeguard of society and of provincial life

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(6) My informant, whose anonymity is kept for obvious reasons, was responding to a questionnaire circulated in the spring of 1972 by the Barnard Women's Center to solicit entries for a bibliography Women's Work and Women's Studies 1971.

(7) Vindication of the Rights of Women (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1967), p. 49.

was that opinions were not acted on." (8) In the twentieth-century, Virginia Woolf was dissecting the education of the Englishwoman,protests now revered as prophecies.

The bias is deep enough in the marrow of society's bones to inspire forgetfulness. It is so morally disreputable, so socially stupid, so intellectually false, and so personally unjust for women that most people are ashamed to admit it influences them. The bias is one aspect of the ideology that assignes men to one sphere and women to another, which asserts that men are spirit, women flesh; men think, women feel; men act, women respond; men command, women obey. Not only are women incapable of rational thought, but they are downright irrational. They no more belong in a university than does an animal or a storm. The phrase, "head of the household," which we usually apply to men, even though women head 10% of American households, fuses the "masculine" qualities of brains and power in a revealing pun.

The ideology is internally self-justifying. Rational man is logical, sensible, reflective, capable of abstract thought. He manipulates the world of the mind. So doing, some doctrines aver, he is like God himself. Active man is energetic, virile, efficient. He manipulates nature and society. So doing, the same doctrines aver, he is again like God. Since men are rational, active, and godlike, they must be sanctioned to command. As Aristotle writes:

> ...although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female. (9)

In sum, men are mind, women matter. Women should neither mind this matter, nor think it matters. Either a Divine Intelligence or hormones meant the sexes to be this way. The theory even has a depressing corollary: men create, women breed; men are artists, women mothers. (10)

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(8) Middlemarch (New York: New American Library, Signet edition, 1964), pp. 11-12.

(9) Politics, Book I, Chapter 12. My edition is Richard McKeon, ed., Introduction to Aristotle (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1947), p. 574.

(10) Three brilliant essays -- Cynthia Ozick, "Women and Creativity: the Demise of the Dancing Dog"; Elaine Showalter, "Women Writers and the Double Standard"; and Linda Nochlin, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" -- expose this corollary. See Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, eds., Woman in Sexist Society (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 307-366. Signet Books issued a paperback edition in 1972. Other incisive comment includes Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1968); Eva Figes, Patriarchal Attitudes (New York: Fawcett, 1971, copyright 1970), esp. Chapters IV and V; and

In Genesis, for example, God, a sacred masculine authority, brings order out of chaos, time and space out of undifferentiated murk, Eden out of muck. Then he makes Adam out of dust. Adam, a profane masculine authority, engages in reasonable activities. He organizes, generalizes, uses language, names. The profoundly rational power of coherent speech is masculinized. "Dumb broad," though slang, is another of the revealing puns ordinary language yields up. The woman the pun evokes is stupid, mute, animal, thick. Even the speech of wise women is gnomic, gnarled, utterances from the mysterious earth that gush forth like blood from the womb, indecipherable except through the exegesis male priests perform -- the speech of the Delphic Oracle, the Sibyl, or a Molly Bloom

Eve substitutes, not only will for obedience, but appetite for reason. To add to her danger, she tempts Adam away from reason. So in Paradise Lost, Eve tells Adam:

> God is thy Law, thou mine; to know no more
> Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.
> (Book IV, ll. 637-38)

Yet Adam is wary. He understands that he is her superior in "the mind and inward Faculties," but her loveliness is so absolute that when he approaches her, everything she says seems "wisest, vurtuouest, discreetest, best." He tells Raphael:

> All higher knowledge in her presence falls
> Degraded, wisdom in discourse with her
> Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes;
> Authoritie and Reason on her waite...
> (Book VIII, ll. 551-54)

Ironically, women, who apparently emasculate the brain as well as genitalia, symbolize intellectual activity, poetic inspiration, and the imagination in their mythic guise of Muse.

The most influential modern spokesman for the ideology of man/mind, woman/matter is Jean Jacques Rousseau. In his erratic masterpiece, Emile (1762), Rousseau plays god. He recreates Eden, Emile a modern Adam, Sophie a modern Eve. He optimistically refuses to re-design the tragedy of the serpent. However, the priest of equality believes women incapable of abstract thought. They can be consulted only in "bodily matters, in all that concerns the senses." (11) The female wit is a scourge to her husband,

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Florence Howe, "The Education of Women," Liberation Now! (New York: Dell Laurel Book, 1971), pp. 293-305. Cf. Eldridge Cleaver, Soul On Ice, still the most provocative analysis of the way in which the formula men/mind, but women/matter has been transformed into white man/mind, all blacks/matter.

(11) Emile, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., Everyman's Library, 1950), p. 306. Wollstonecraft wrote her Vindication of the Rights of Women in part to refute Rousseau's theories of women's intellect and their education.

children, friends, servants, and the general public. Girls need learn only the secrets of virtue, beauty, and chastity. The faculties they may cultivate are wit, guile, and cunning: the defenses of the weak against the strong. Rousseau throws women some bones, upon which they munch still. They are the mothers of the race, and unless they mother well, the race will not do well. Paradoxically, the inferior best nurture the young. Next, women's sexual allure will give them power over men. They are at their most alluring when they seem most weak. In effect, if Sophie will only lie at Emile's feet, she will have him throwing himself at her feet -- a neat gymnastic trick.

Rousseau anticipates one of history's ironies. Women, damned for centuries because they were irrational and carnal, are now damned if they are insufficiently irrational and carnal. The jeremiad, of which Norman Mailer is now the best known voice, claims that rational man has unleashed the monsters of science and technology. Women are still unscientific, atechnological, natural, carnal. The last defense of a humane society is for them to stay that way.

Some other voices make women, as muse, the symbol of destructive science. Edgar Allen Poe begins "Sonnet--to Science," with the line "Science! True daughter of Old Time thou art!" before he goes on to describe science as a vulture. Mailer and Poe have more in common than it seems. Both reveal the post-Romantic fear of science, which women share, and the post-Romantic refusal to believe that calculated reason and spontaneous imagination may work together, which women share. Both reveal a traditional fear of women so haunting that women symbolize whatever force a man finds threatening. (12)

The people who resist Women's Studies are so numerous, the affection for intelligent women so frail, the self-destructive impulses within Women's Studies so tempting, the unanswered questions so complex, that it seems obvious that Women's Studies is in a position of weakness. A preliminary to shoring up that position is to add up what the believers in Women's Studies have in common. Surely everyone would assent to these hypotheses:

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(12) School enrollment figures also show how much we have institutionalized our belief that men are rational and women not. In 1969, 91.6% of all boys between the ages of 16 and 17 were in some kind of school. So were 87.7% of the girls. 59.4% of all boys between the ages of 18 and 19 were still in school. Only 41.8% of the girls were. We educate women, but not that highly.
Simon, Kenneth A. and W. Vance Grant, "Table 4," Digest of Educational Statistics (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 4. I have assumed that the gap between 16/17 and 18/19 represents, for the most part, the gap between high school and more advanced work.

1) American colleges and universities and their support services -- repositories of sophisticated knowledge, factories of new ideas -- have either warped what we know about women or behaved as if women were hardly worth knowing about at all. The process is parallel to the process through which women have been trivialized in the academy itself. That process is parallel to the processes of society-at-large. A primary task is to rectify error and to fill lacunae. Many subtle insights will come from the outcast (e.g. servants, lesbians, domestic workers, old women).

2) The drama of the classroom has been largely barren. The structure, the master professor's domination of an apprentice pupil, whether the professor is a man or a woman, is interestingly like the structure of the patriarchy. (One of the multiple ironies of the women's colleges is their devotion to such a classroom.)

To fracture and reset an ossified pedagogy, we need:

a) To learn more about a student's conscious and unconscious needs. A woman student will probably have to be encouraged to believe that she has the talent to learn; that society will reward her if she does; and that if society does not, it may be society's fault. (13) A man will probably have to learn that the capacity for intellectual rigor and play is less a cruel competition to be won than a humane skill to be sought. If a woman is asked to live more freely, a man is asked to discover how often his free life has been rooted in the subordination of a woman. Unhappily, few male professors set their male students exemplary attitudes of self-reform.

b) To bring women of several ages, circumstances, and economic groups into the classroom. The monochromatic American school isolates persons of one age, often to turn them into one class, if they are not already members. One result is that women learn only from their peers. In need of multiple visions, they receive mirror images. A way to enlarge the classroom is to take it off-campus and into the community. Women should, however, distrust glib references to "the community," Not only may they reflect a white, middle-class condescension towards non-white or lower-class women, but they ignore a serious problem of community colleges. The community college is a tool which a student can use to achieve the legitimate security of the middle-class. The person who teaches Women's Studies has the hard job of both pointing out the defects of middle-class sexual roles and encouraging ambition.

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(13) The influence of the research of Matina Horner has been wide and widely noted. Horner concluded that women wish to avoid success; they fear it will have negative consequences, especially if achieved in competition with men. See "Sex differences in achievement motivation and performance in competitive and non-competitive situations," a doctoral thesis completed at the University of Michigan in 1968, reported in Dissertation Abstracts (1969), 30 (1-B), 407. Dr. Susan M. Robison, Psychology Department, Ohio University, Lancaster, Ohio, is doing work that appears to confirm and to extend Horner's findings.

3) Women's Studies, or at the very least its proponents, find acceptable a minimal political program: it is bizarre to alter the knowledge of women without altering the psychological, educational, social, and political context within which knowlddge is garnered, passed down, and received. The minimal political tasks are: work against sexual bias in the primary and secondary schools so that college may be more than remedial aid; a guarantee that the university itself is fair to women students and employees in hiring, promoting, admissions, counseling, access to facilities, financial aid, health services, and pensions; and access for women to the facts they need to fight discrimination outside of the university. As Ann Scott, who was a member of the English Department of the University of Buffalo, who is the vice president of legislation of the National Organization for Women, writes:

> I believe that a university must equip women to survive in our world of the overpowering institutions which have historically excluded them (including the university itself). It can do this through adopting a variety of intervention techniques designed for enabling women to intervene for themselves, through using its own resources to intervene for them, and through using its own structure as an arena for training in intervention. ("Educating American Women for the Leisure Class," Educational Leadership (October 1971), 30.)

Common assent to these propositions should be enough to start flexible coalitions among disparate groups of women from one campus or from several campuses. Men -- who give political support, who suspect masculinity as usual, who encourage younger men to rebel against its strictures -- can be engaging allies. If women need a coherent political strategy, I suggest they adopt the tactic of postponement. That is, they should avoid confrontation over any political or educational question that is not immediately, perceptibly related to women's issues. This excludes neither debate nor practical decisions on a local level. Indeed, it will encourage a multiplicity of local decisions. A Women's Studies program in California may reject foundation money; a Women's Studies program in Idaho may accept it. It does exclude both the use of Women's Studies as a national vehicle for any single ideology and rigidity that leads to accusations of betrayal if one group acts differently from another.

Women's Studies will embody, not a politics of chaos, nor a politics of purity, but a politics of energy. The movement will consist of a cluster of self-generating forces, a multiplicity of constellations. Each will devise its own goal and methods. One group may negotiate with conservatives. Another may consolidate the experiments of other groups. Still another may serve as a cutting edge of action and of theory. However, being a cutting edge demands a new notion of a cutting edge. It leads, but does not slash those following. Shock troops must be careful about the shock treatments they administer to other women. My admonition is less a prissy call for compromise than a reminder about the self-proclaimed nature of feminism as a political movement: a pride in paying careful attention to the concerns of all the women whom they seek to serve and to the visceral details of their lives. The virtues of a politics of energy are the stimulus to women

to be autonomous and self-defining; the creation of a number of models of local activity to test for future use; and the winning of time until Women's Studies is both more internally coherent and more muscular.

Yet, to be realistic, individuals and small groups are often isolated among the tangles of the grassroots. Women's Studies badly needs a national organization to support people in trouble locally; a national organization to provide publicity and legal aid to people in jeopardy. Such a national body might have three other functions: 1) to distribute information, tapes, bibliographies, lists of courses, films, and so on; 2) to conduct research projects, such as the actual effect of a women's studies course on an institution at large, or the use of women's studies courses off-campus; and 3) to sponsor conferences on important questions. The most important questions touch on public policy (e.g. the real effect the nuclear family in contemporary society has on women, or the great demographic shifts in the ratio of men to women). They reveal the connections between the talents of the academic community and the needs of the larger community. A national office, which saw its functions as either being defensive or comparatively neutral, would avoid taking sides in ideological quarrels. The strategy is consistent with the tactics of postponement and a politics of energy.

People from Women's Studies programs, Women's Centers (whether they have a formal academic affiliation or not), journals, presses, and professional caucuses, should meet to organize a national program. The central office might move from region to region each year to avoid rigid centralization. Administration, proposals for funding, and spending of what funding there might actually be must include all positions within the Women's Studies movement. If the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, for example, were to sponsor a series of open seminars about Women's Studies, each to last a week, one in each state, the organizers would insure that a person from a more traditional program would speak, a person from an experimental center would speak, etc. (14)

The governing structure I suggest will degenerate into bad feeling and sniping unless women recognize that the movement is at that point where no-one knows what will bring the equitable future everyone wants. An attack on another woman, or on a specific program, may be not simply a symptom of hostility, not simply a paragraph in a chapter of political argument, but a premature lopping off of a possibly fruitful program.

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(14) Federal funding of women's programs is possible. On April 18, 1972, the Honorable Patsy Mink introduced a bill, the Women's Education Act of 1972, "to authorize the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to make grants to conduct special educational programs and activities concerning women, and for other related educational purposes." (92nd Congress, 2d Session, H.R. 14451.) The bill was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor.

At the risk of revisionism or blasphemy, I also suggest that the merits of the star system and of elitism, which is a star system extended to a highly refined group, be recalled. The onerous dangers of the star system have been exposed: the confusion of star and movement, of elite and group; the selection of the "star" through the media or through current governors, not through the movement; the feeding of the egos of the few while the many suffer malnutrition. Yet "stars" are often smart, hard-working, courageous, and skillful. They do things. Kate Millett sat down and wrote Sexual Politics. I did not, nor did anyone else. Trying to abolish the star system must avoid the risk of leveling pioneers, prophets, and the odd spirits who find joy in lonely work. Trying to demolish hierarchies must avoid the risk of inhibiting skill.

Many of the attacks on the glittering and on the high also graph, as I wrote before, a fever chart of insecurity. They may also be signals of loneliness. The cry of "elitist" may represent a hope that through recrimination and demand an easing of the spirit may be conjured up. Instead of crying "elitist," women might discover the creative function of insecurity. We are at a radical discontinuity with history. The past has been rejected. The future is opaque. The present is a place where insecurity and loneliness, parasites that feed on radical discontinuities, are transformed into humility, a recognition that the self cannot be an exemplum, only an experiment. Humility is a quality of the tolerance that is a consequence of reason. But then, I have faith in reason and in the benefits of rational activity. My faith reaffirms, in the teeth of an irrational educational system, that mind matters.

I am more hopeful as I finish than when I began. I have recalled how evanescent the quarrels within the women's movement have been. The fight about lesbians, for example, has faded. I remember the buoyancy that comes from sensing that to work for Women's Studies is to belong to a historical tide, a mood that injects the excitement necessary to defeat the fatigue of tedious detail and psychic conflict. Then I think that women have shown that talent for reconciliation within the movement, when they have controlled events. Women's Studies, for the most part, must survive within an institution that women do not control, in which others incite quarrels for their gain, and in which competing interests may divide women.

I console myself, during this debate taped within the mind by picturing the great moral vision and the spacious future that the New Feminism promises. I picture a community, a collectivity, in which the physiology of birth is remarked upon, but not remarkable. The community imposes one imperative upon its members: that the shaping of the self must not demand the sacrifice of another. Both martyrdom and murder must be obsolete. In this community, a moral ecology works; the law has a little to do with justice; tenderness is the basis of all etiquette; and physical force and co-ercion are taboo. A community in which The Pentagon Papers refers to a geometry textbook, and in which women do geometry, too.

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